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presented in chapter 6, it is a well-known fact that agricultural collectivization, compounded by the severe flood in 1970s, devastated wet rice farming and consequently led to the starvation of large number of farmers. Factoring such ground level developments in Laos might have resulted in a better interpretation of statistics.

Although statistics obviously include potential biases and errors, it is also true that they are often the only data available from which we can infer geographical variations and longitudinal changes in agriculture. Although the findings of this book are neither groundbreaking nor innovative, *Gambling with the Land* is undoubtedly an informative reference on the agricultural transformation in Southeast Asia over the last 60 years.

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### ***Student Activism in Malaysia: Crucible, Mirror, Sideshow***

MEREDITH L. WEISS

Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications and Singapore: NUS Press, 2011, xi+302p.

In April 2012, the amendment of the University and University College Act (UUCA) was approved in the lower house of Parliament in Malaysia. Before the amendment, UUCA had prohibited students from joining political parties and supporting political campaigning and protests. Although the amended law now allows students to engage in political activities outside campus, it is still restrictive because, for example, the new law gives each university the power to decide which organizations are allowed for student participation except political parties. But what is important here is that the Malaysian government has relaxed the UUCA, the restrictive provisions of which the government had hitherto refused to amend since its introduction in 1971. Against this background, the decline of the intellectual quality and the apathy of students in local universities have become increasingly apparent in recent times. The major parts of *Student Activism in Malaysia* read as an historical narrative, but also give us numerous suggestions and hints concerning current Malaysian politics and society.

The concept of “student activism” is ambiguous, as this book points out. While Weiss defines “student” as a collective identity and discussions of “student activism” in this book usually refer to students enrolled in tertiary-level institutions, the status of students is rather confusing “since they are expected to be future leaders, students’ potential may garner them respect and cultivate arrogance disproportionate to their age and experience, yet they remain for the moment still subordinates in society” (p. 3). On the other hand, Weiss argues that “efforts to define student activ-

ism not as a social movement like others, but as a 'culture', obscure the mechanisms behind that activism: implicit or explicit framing processes, organizational maintenance, and other aspect of micromobilization for collective action" (p. 5). Within the context of this book, its main objectives are to explore student activism as a distinctive genre of social movement and also examine those political impacts and externalities that influenced student activism in Malaysia (p. 3).

The underlying focus of this book is student activism, but Weiss's perspective is wider. She locates the campus within a larger environment and examines the relationship between student activism and outside political forces, such as political parties and NGOs, and agenda like anti-colonialism and socialism. This book consists of seven chapters. Except Chapters 1 and 7, each chapter develops historical narratives starting with World War II until 2010. Following the introductory and theoretical parts of Chapter 1, Weiss examines the pre-independence period (before 1957), analyzing the alliance between Malayan students, radical journalists, and early political parties and how they prepared for independence (p. 25). The first decade after independence from 1957 to 1966 is covered in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 focuses on the period of the heyday of protest from 1967 to 1974, when student activism in Malaysia peaked. Students allied with peasants and urban squatters supported the protests among these sectors and also involved themselves in the general elections outside their campuses. However, student activism and its environment drastically changed after 1974, following changes in the student demographic trend. Weiss notes how prior to 1969 it was Chinese students who accounted for around 70 percent of the Malaysian undergraduate population, while Malays made up less than 30 percent (p. 19). She also notes how by the mid-1970s, those populations had nearly reversed (p. 19). The government tightened control over students and universities with the introduction in 1971 and the amendment in 1974 of the UUCA. Chapter 5 looks at the period of "normalized" higher education from 1975 to 1998 where "new universities and other institutions for higher education proliferated" and discusses how "campus politics increasingly came to mimic the partisan patterns outside the gate" (p. 26). Chapter 6 looks at the period of the gradual revitalization of student activism in the late 1990s in the wake of the *Reformasi* movement.

Weiss argues that "Malaysian students have been less inclined toward radicalism than their counterparts in neighboring states for at least the past few decades" (p. 18). Why have Malaysian students (and student activism) been less radical than neighboring states such as Indonesia and Thailand? This question is important, as it illuminates not only the character of Malaysian students and youth but also the long-term stability of the political regime since the 1970s led by the Barisan Nasional (BN). The key periods that answer this question are from 1967 to 1974 (Chapter 4) and from 1975 to 1998 (Chapter 5).

After the introduction and the amendment of UUCA in the 1970s, Weiss highlights how it was stiff penalties and the consequences of student activism that accounted for the "inaction" of student activism (p. 291). However, she also shows how the experiences of other surrounding nations

were also taken into account (such as New Order Indonesia, Marcos' Philippines, and Ne Win's Burma, as well as China and South Korea) (p. 291). As she notes it is through "intellectual containment" that "the state delegitimizes students' participation to undercut the challenge they pose, while at the same time minimizing over coercion" (p. 26). There are as such, two main forms of intellectual containment by the state: rewriting history and physical containment. Weiss points out;

By obscuring the history of student (and other, especially left-wing) activism, the Malaysian authorities have significantly stymied mobilization. Today, students are told that it is out of character for Malaysian students to engage politically. (p. 293)

Social movement theories, especially framing theories, bear out the fact that to mobilize people, "activists in one country actively borrow 'cultural ideas, items, or practices', such as norms of student empowerment and protest tactics, then tailor these to fit local context" (p. 283). What her work shows is that the government project to rewrite history since the mid-1970s deprived student activists of source materials for mobilization.

Another way of intellectual containment is through physical containment. By erecting fences, establishing campuses away from city centers, removing public spaces for students to gather, channeling activism toward less-than-meaningful elections and petitions, and co-opting student activists into political party machines, the government sought to hamper students' solidarity and cooperation. Weiss points out that in University of Malaya (UM), the closure of the Union House and demolition of the Speakers Corner after 1974 made mobilizing students more difficult.

In addition to intellectual containment, commercialization and popularization of higher education in the mid-1990s also contributed to the declining momentum of student activism in Malaysia. Before the 1970s, UM was the only university in Malaysia and undergraduates and graduates were seen as the elite who would lead future Malaysia. By the 1999, 11 public universities, 6 vocationally oriented universities, and 10 polytechnics were established. In addition to these public institutions, 15 private universities and three medical schools were also established by corporations by early 2002, and hundreds of private colleges also joined in the Malaysian educational market. Weiss emphasizes that in this new context higher education itself now has more to do with the price one is prepared to pay to secure a decent job rather than "merely the means to pursue humanistic aims" (p. 191).

In sum, this book is based on historical narratives of student activism in Malaysia, but offers many interesting theoretical implications and comparative perspectives for those interested in students and protest movements in post-colonial states.

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